

NHBDA Outstanding Band Director of the Year Award

Acceptance Remarks

Written by Diane Francoeur

July 8, 2016

I can't believe I am standing here today! Thank you so much for this incredible award. It is such an honor to be here with so many outstanding colleagues and I am so touched that my principal at West High School, Chris Motika, who unfortunately cannot be here today, has taken the time to recognize the challenges, dedication and commitment in our Music Program. When I entered our 1st session yesterday and started listening to the amazing Anthony Maiello's passionate words about music education, I started thinking about the incredibly successful people I would be speaking in front of today and I suddenly felt overcome with fear! But it only lasted a few minutes. When he said "Everyone makes mistakes...EVERYONE makes mistakes"... I felt some relief so thank you for saying that. Thank you to all of you that have presented at this conference this week. You have all been an incredible inspiration. Thank you very much!

I think that most people, if not everyone, experiences an "Aha" moment...that moment when the meaning of life seems to light up a place in our brain and in our hearts. One special person in my life, and I have many, was my Dad. When I started first grade, he would drive me to my piano lesson along with my sister to the First Church on the top of Main Street in Nashua. Every Saturday morning, I walked into this very large room to play the grand piano under the direction of Elmer "Pop" Wilson. Pop was 80 years old, had had throat cancer and used a special device to speak, which he held next to his throat. If you knew Pop, you knew that he had quite the resume. He taught at Nashua High School, UNH and was a pianist for the BSO and more. At six years old, I didn't care about his resume though. I liked that I would go home and practice hard and come back to my lesson to surprise him with something new. One day he told my father that I learned a particular piece in one week and he called me a little monkey. I was so proud!!! I can't believe that I took that as a compliment! Needless to say those piano lessons changed my life. Music was so much a part of my life. I was surrounded by music at home and very influenced by the success of my siblings in the field of music education!

Back to my Aha moment.....One day in November of 2007, my Dad had asked me if he could see my Band room at West High School. I tell this story often because it really speaks to the purpose and meaning of music. I was still new at this band director position and he knew that I,

and many others were a bit nervous about the changes that were coming to West. Our well to do neighboring community had decided to build their own high school, which meant that we were going to lose half of our population over the next few years. As my Dad entered the Band room with his cane and camel colored coat and hat, he had difficulty walking to my office. He stood in the middle of the Band room and said, “ This is beautiful honey.” I said “Beautiful Dad? How can you say that? Can’t you see the stains and the holes in the carpet?” He said, “ It’s not the carpet that makes this room beautiful honey, it’s what you do in here that makes it beautiful”. You see we didn’t know, but he knew, his health was failing and he was near the end. We lost him 3 weeks later and during those final few days when we were having one last special conversation together, he looked up to me and told me not to give up at West. I am still amazed that as he was approaching the finish line in his life, he was thinking of me... *and* my students. He was the youngest of 19 children and he was that inner city little boy that could only dream about having music lessons and an instrument to call his own. When I look into my students’ eyes, I see the eyes of my Dad. He loved music and learning right to the end! His philosophy of self-motivation, perseverance, of community outreach, of being your own leader in your life, is what we strive for in our Band program. He changed my view of teaching that day...it was no longer about doing this gig for my own happiness, although I do love it! It was about making a difference in the lives of our beautiful students, no matter how rich, how poor, how smart, or how talented or what town or country they are from.

By the way, the number of students at West has changed significantly; it went from approximately 2394 eleven years ago when I started, and now stands at 880. As the number of students decreased, the number of students moving in from other parts of the world started to increase. We now stand at @50% in financial need and 12% in the English Language Learning program. The good news is we are surviving the endless transition; our students are beautiful and are having a great time in the Band room!

I feel so fortunate to be a music teacher. We hear often that there are too many changes in education today. I am enrolled in a course right now and guess what it is called ... “Transforming the Educational Agenda”! I have heard so many educators talk about the changes and initiatives that are being implemented in their schools and many times they continue to say that they have failed. In fact, the topic for our next project is *Why Initiatives Fail?* They fail due to many reasons right? Either the funding ends, the leadership changes, the staff does not buy into the

program, and so on. There is a quote that I wrote about recently and it goes like this; “It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change.” Clarence Darrow wrote this. He lived 1857-1938! I *loved* this quote because it brought to light for me that change has been around forever! People have always been looking for something to make their lives better or to help them cope with their lives as time moves forward. In education we are always looking for something to help bring our students to success. Well in the Band room, I believe that through all of this talk about the need for change, music is like magic. Music brings the room together, to create, collaborate, express, share, analyze, and to celebrate the beauty in life. All of the goals teachers strive for in the classroom become reality in the Band room! And we all do this everyday! How lucky are we???

Today, a special teacher and friend in my life, Dave Seiler, is here to be recognized and I just want to take this opportunity to say that he...”you”... have been an incredible inspiration in my life. I started clarinet lessons with Dave in September of 1979. After 2 years, I left UNH and moved to Hawaii to be with my husband Leo who was in the Army and stationed on the island of Oahu. When I returned 2 years later, I came back to Dave with my clarinet. He was so great and so supportive through this time. I performed my senior recital while 7 months pregnant for my sweet daughter Katie. You can only imagine performing Debussy’s *Premiere Rhapsody* on the clarinet with a 5 lb. baby in your abdomen! Talk about breath support!! Well, right before my recital, I was *so* nervous that I accidentally jammed the pieces of my clarinet together and bent all of the side keys significantly. I will always remember watching him as he *calmly* took out his screwdriver and repaired my mess. He told me later that he wasn’t sure he would be able to fix it but he did! I will always remember that and be grateful! Thank you for that Dave and for always being there for me. Throughout the years, you have always had encouraging words for me and that really helped me especially during some challenging times in teaching. YOU have made me a better person and I hope that I have made a difference for my students as you have for me.

I also want to thank my dedicated husband Leo, who stands by me as I run to rehearsals, football games, and continue to take course after course. Thank you also to my beautiful daughters Katie and Jessica and Katie’s sweet husband Mike for always being there. Katie and Mike have blessed our family with 2 gorgeous little boys who just light up our lives with joy! I also want to thank my brother Andy, his wife Kim, and their daughter Malei for being here today. They were able to make some last minute changes to their schedule to be here and I really appreciate it! Talk about

an inspiration... Andy has been a *huge* inspiration to me as a teacher and as an individual. He has been like a second Dad throughout my life and I thank you so very much for *everything*!

In closing, when I think about the kind of teacher I would like to be, I think about my beautiful grandsons. I want to be the kind of teacher that I would like them to have, especially when they are having a bad day, or when they need words of encouragement, or need to be forgiven or guided firmly but lovingly. I want them to have that special teacher that will help them learn love and respect for themselves and others and the teacher that will bring them to the next level in their life. I want them to have the teacher that will make the difference for them! THAT's the kind of teacher *I* want to be when I grow up!

Thank you so much for this honor and thank you for all you do for our students! Enjoy the rest of your summer!